

# Ep 34 The Wines of Rioja with Greta Megroff from Ramón Bilba...

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

rioja, wine, bilbao, wines, winery, people, bit, altura, tempranillo, grape, vineyards, vintage, haro, drinking, aged, mar de, spanish, winemakers, spain, reserva



## SPEAKERS

Janina Doyle, Greta Megroff



Janina Doyle 00:06

Welcome to Eat Sleep Wine Repeat, a podcast for all you wine lovers, who, if you're like me just cannot get enough of the good stuff. I'm Janina Doyle, your host, Brand Ambassador, Wine Educator, and Sommelier. So stick with me as we dive deeper into this ever evolving wonderful world of wine. And wherever you are listening to this, cheers to you. Hello lovely wine lovers, hope the week is going okay for you. So today's episode is all about the wines of Rioja, and specifically, the wonderful winery Ramón Bilbao. I'm joined today by Greta Megroff, who is the Brand Ambassador for this awesome winery. Now, side note for anybody wanting to educate yourself more on the wines of Rioja, type into Google, Rioja wine Academy. The wines of Rioja have created this diploma that you can do, so a course that's online, there'll be a little certificate at the end. If you do it, then you get your diploma, let me know, so I can personally congratulate you.



Janina Doyle 01:13

So one of the questions I often get about Rioja is: "What does crianza or reserva mean when you look at the label?" Now, they're not actually quality levels, what they mean are ageing terms. So if you don't see anything on the label, it probably is just a generic wine. It's a young wine, they might call it joven, that means young, in Spanish. And it means a year or two, it's been maybe an oak, maybe not. But that's it, the maximum the wine has been is up to two years. When you see crianza on a bottle, and I'm actually going to tell you, red wines, because of course you can find these for white wines as well. But let's just look at red wines. Red wine, crianza has to age for two years, and it will spend one year in oak. Reserva, same amount of time needed in Oak, so one year, but actually three years in total. So two years total ageing for crianza and three years for reserva. When he gets to grand reserva, it is five years in total before it can be released and at least two years in oak. So that gives you an idea in terms of the fact that they'll have more time to gain some oakley flavour. So there'll be more concentrated, maybe a little bit more tobacco, maybe a little bit more smoky, dried fruits, especially when you start getting into the grand reservas. And of course, if there is none of these terms, you expect lovely juicy fruit. The younger Riojas will always have more red fruits. And then as they get older, they'll go darker fruit. Tempranillo is the main grape variety of Rioja. And when it's young, it's very fresh and fruity. And then as it gets older with age and with oak, he gets more dusty and tobacco and you get that leather. So expect those differences depending on what wine you're picking. Now of course, as I mentioned, you can get white wines that are aged. So if you see either a crianza a reserva or a grand reserva for white wines, they all have to have had at least six months of ageing in barrel, but with the crianza after that six months it can be released, with a reserva it needs to be held back for two years and with a grand reserva four years, so that hopefully gives you an idea there. The main great variety for white Rioja is viura. This is also known as macabeo. So one of the main grape varieties used in Cava. This grape varieties very kind of melon, lemony lime, a little bit of herbal

nature and it has that real incredible ability to age and as it does expect flavours of caramelised honey, even roasted pineapple, quince and a real oily richness and seeing as I mentioned viura or macabeo, as they call it in Catalonia generally for their Cava production, Cava can be made in Rioja. And specifically you can have a Rioja sparkling wine which will be made in the traditional method. If it doesn't have any labelling term on it, it will be a more generic style. It needs a minimum of 15 months after its second fermentation resting in bottle. If it says reserva it's 24 months in that bottle and if it says gran añada, so not grand reserva but gran añada, it is 36 months. So maybe you might want to listen back to this, take a pen and paper. Oh, I might point out I am now transcribing, yay me, these episodes. And so, go to the show notes, you'll see the link, you can download the PDF file and you can listen along and here all this stuff I am mentioning so hopefully that is helpful.



Janina Doyle 04:57

So typically Rioja is a blended wine. Occasionally, they do use single varieties, and you will then typically see that written on the label, but a standard Tempranillo takes the main seat, I've already talked about that quickly. Garnacha is the grape variety that comes in second. And Garnacha is very different. It's loads of red fruit, red raspberries, white pepper, much more alcohol, bigger, rounder in body, and not as high acidity but lovely juiciness. The other two grape varieties that people are not so familiar with are, Mazuelo. This is a grape variety that can really add acidity, to the blend, and the other one, which I adore, and I think a lot of winemakers really do to: Graciano. The issue with Graciano is that it is very low yielding. It's also not an easy grape to grow. But it has a load of aroma, low to spice. It's beautiful and powerful. It has real ability to age and loads and loads of structure. So if you ever see a single variety Graciano do check it out. Now I realise there's so many things I could talk about with Rioja, so let me know, get in contact, I'll maybe do another bonus podcast for Rioja, maybe on the terroir, maybe on Viñedos Singulares, which is the top quality classification now for single vineyard wines, let me know, but for now, let's go to the interview with Greta.



Janina Doyle 06:32

Thank you so much for joining me. I really appreciate you coming to talk about Ramón Bilbao.



Greta Megroff 06:37

You're most welcome, pleasure to be here



Janina Doyle 06:39

And how long have you been working for Ramón Bilbao?



Greta Megroff 06:41

So it's been over two and a half years now. So I've done two full cycles of sort of crazy summer events and travelling around the country going to Spain. So yeah, really good run.



Janina Doyle 06:55

I'm slightly jealous. I have my own personal relationship with Rioja. And actually part of it is dedicated to my dad, who is a very middle class educated gentleman with degrees, very funny, but he's not silly. I took him to Rioja for his 60th birthday. And we spent three days in Rioja going around. And he actually found it like it was a sweetie store for children. And he called it RiojaLand and I thought that he was joking. But then literally, when we got back to England, he carried on telling, I heard him telling stories and stories about RiojaLand to other adults. And I just thought it was just the cutest thing in the world. So RiojaLand it is so....



Greta Megroff 07:36

That's so special. And I think, well I've been, yeah, I feel really lucky to have been working with Rioja for these couple of years. And then before that I was working for Phipps. So with wines, wines of Rioja as a whole. So I've been like, yeah, I've had a relationship with the region for quite a while but I totally agree. Like my dad likes drinking Rioja, though between you and me, his go to is Muriel. So I mean, he'll drink Ramón Bilbao, like, anything that he gets from me, of course.



Janina Doyle 08:10

Well of course its free, it helps, right?



Greta Megroff 08:12

Yes. Hey, he is willing to pay as well, but he buys Muriel in the co op too. But I, yeah, from travelling around the UK and Ireland. It's amazing how many people like have a relationship with the region and they want to come up and talk to you about, like when they went to Haro or Logroño, or when they went to Bilbao, so it's great to work for such a

well known wine region.



Janina Doyle 08:36

Oh for sure. And you mentioned the Logroño, which anyone who doesn't know is the capital of Rioja, Ah, it's just the... it's Pinchos, isn't it? The food, it's called Pinchos, no?



Greta Megroff 08:47

Pinchos, Tapas, so Pinchos is the Basque name. So on the Basque side, we've got Pinchos but the famous street in Logroño, that you've got to get to go to is Calle de Laurel. So, everyone that's been on a trip there talks about like the little roasted mushrooms that they do so you get like a Pincho with a roast mushroom and a little shrimp on top. I've always loved, like surprisingly because it's, I mean Galicia is famous for Pulpo (octopus) but there's actually a really good place that does Pulpo a la gallega so, Galician style octopus, so that with a glass of like white Rioja or Albariño is just perfect.



Janina Doyle 09:25

It's gorgeous, isn't it?



Greta Megroff 09:26

Yeah, you can stumble from bar to bar and have a little glass of wine and the tapas in each place and every single one is special for like a different thing.



Janina Doyle 09:37

You know the funny thing that we, this is obviously completely away from the wine but I'm going there anyway, the one thing we thought was so amazing about being in that main street of Logroño. We were there until late at night drinking wine and eating our food and moving along, as you said, to you know, bar after bar and place, and what happens is, I found it so strange, this would never happen in England, is that they sweep out all the tissues and all the rubbish that everyone just dropped on the floor, just literally out onto the Main Street, don't they? So by the end of the night, there's so much rubbish on the street and I'm just like, oh, okay, cool. Like, no worries, it kind of adds to this fiesta environment. But then you wake up. We got out, I think the next day at like eight o'clock in the morning and the streets were perfect. You have to hand it to the people in Spain. They tidy up perfectly after any evening out. I mean, it was super, it was just a memory. It was just fantastic.

- G** Greta Megroff 10:31  
Well, if you think it was like grubby after people have been out, like drinking and throwing their little napkins on the floor, apparently, the history of the Calle Laurel is it used to be the red light district so....
- J** Janina Doyle 10:44  
ohhhhhh it's more interesting, so it was a little bit dirtier.
- G** Greta Megroff 10:48  
Yeah, it was a little bit grubbier. And the little bars and tapas spots popped up for the punters who were a little bit peckish after their visit to Calle Laurel so that is apparently how it sprung up as, um, yeah, like a foodie hotspot.
- J** Janina Doyle 11:05  
I love that. That's an awesome story. There you go everybody, if you didn't want to go there just because of the pinchos and the wine, now you know, there you go, go and check out how it used to be.
- G** Greta Megroff 11:14  
I should add, its not like that anymore.
- J** Janina Doyle 11:17  
Yea yeah, don't go for that, go for the sense of feeling... oh I'll shut up now. Right I want to drink some of the wine that I have in front of me. Now I have two different bottles. I'm very lucky girl. What do you have in front of you?
- G** Greta Megroff 11:31  
So I've got, yep, the same two bottles as you and the Ramón Bilbao Edición Limitada and I think we should definitely go for that first because thats maybe a more, we'd call it maybe a more modern style of Rioja. Its a crianza by category, but it might surprise you with its characteristics as not perhaps fitting into your traditional idea of a crianza and then the other wine is the Viñedos de Altura. So that one, I was thinking, try that one second just because it's 50% Garnacha, so it's got a little bit more umphh to it as well. So

the first style is a little more restrained. And then the second one, Altura, is a little more spicy and bold.



Janina Doyle 12:15

Okay, so this one, the Edición Limitada, is this 100% Tempranillo?



Greta Megroff 12:20

Yeah, it's 100% Tempranillo from Rioja Alta, so the towns where the grapes come from, yeah, near to Haro, Villalba, Cuzcurrita and Abalos.



Janina Doyle 12:29

Yeah, tell me, obviously I know the winery is in Haro, but all the vineyards are completely in Rioja Alta?



Greta Megroff 12:35

So the Tempranillo comes from Rioja Alta and some of the wines that we make with Garnacha, the rosado for example. In the Viñedos de Altura you've got some Garnacha on the Rioja Oriental side. But yeah, overall Ramón Bilbao's got about, I'd say, 400 hectares of vineyards which are managed and like, yeah, scrupulously managed by long term relationships we have with growers and then about 75 hectares of owned vineyards in the Rioja Alta area as well.



Janina Doyle 13:08

It's not bad, it's a decent amount to keep you going isn't it? Yeah, I am loving this so I'm just we'll talk about this in a second. I'm just going to drink it! I'd like to drink it whilst you just tell me a little bit of story of Ramón Bilbao, if you could introduce us all listening to this wine a little bit more.



Greta Megroff 13:25

Totally! So Ramón Bilbao, one of the first things people usually ask me is, is Ramón Bilbao in Bilbao? I mean, we know it's from Rioja but when I'm doing events, people often ask that. But his name is Ramon Bilbao, and he was from around Bilbao. So he's born in the foothills of Bilbao, but he was taken to Rioja by, I mean, this is just such a textbook story, that he fell for a girl from Rioja. So he ended up going down to Rioja and in 1924, he set up

the Ramón Bilbao winery, and if you visit the winery, you get to see a little bit of what it used to look like as well. So you've got the lagares, so the big traditional tanks, you've got big traditional oak vats and the kind of wines that people would have used to drink really without much, well without any barrel ageing, but just fermented in big oak barrels as well. And then we've got really a sort of state of the art winery, which has been completely renovated in 1999. So that was when our winemaker chief winemaker came on board, and his name is Rodolfo Bastida. So he's really well known in the industry, I mean he's worked with Rioja for I don't know how long, but he's been with Ramón Bilbao since 1999. And he is, I would say, kind of the heart and soul of the winery as well, like he, he's overseen a lot of changes and kind of got us where we are today, which is, yeah, one of the top 50 most admired wine brands I can very proudly say.



Janina Doyle 14:58

I did see this on the website and what I also saw on the website was this really interesting story of a wooden bike, what's the story of the wooden bike?



Greta Megroff 15:08

Yes. So the wooden bike, I mean everything, I've got the chance to do quite a few events, really good sort of fun things in London for our sales guys at Enotria and Coe and all sorts of different things. But all of our language around Ramón Bilbao and what we tried to do to show off the brand is all about the journey really. So the wooden bike plays into our journey theme and where the journey begins, you'll see on a lot of our stuff, but it's because that Ramón Bilbao himself was a really big believer in travelling and exporting his wines really before it was a done thing. So he could, we've got records that show he went to India, he was exporting wines to Cuba to the Americas. Yeah, this is in his lifetime. And he started the winery in 1924. So we're talking yeah, like 30s 40s...Oh, nice slurp!



Janina Doyle 16:06

Sorry, I'm listening. I'm listening. I'm drinking, it's lovely. So there you go, slurp away.



Greta Megroff 16:13

That works really well on audio? Yeah.



Janina Doyle 16:16

Is this a competition? Are you trying to outslurp me? Because if you are, I can slurp louder.



G Greta Megroff 16:20  
I wouldn't, I wouldn't dare.

J Janina Doyle 16:23  
Okay, good. I'm glad. I'm glad that we understand that. I'm sorry. Carry on with your conversation whilst I slurp away.

G Greta Megroff 16:27  
No, that's really, that's really all I have to say is that Ramón Bilbao, we have him to thank I guess for where we are today and being such a like well recognised worldly wine brand in sort of markets all over the world. And the bike is just one way of keeping that story alive. If you look at the bottles you've got as well you'll see he's on every bottle so he comes up on our crianza and reserva, sort of sailing the seven seas on a clock and on the Viñedos de Altura he's climbing the mountains, which is just to show off the altitude concepts.

J Janina Doyle 17:03  
Yeah, I love the labels to be honest. This is delicious. This is a really approachable but serious, concentrated wine. I like all the fruits in it. So it really is very juicy with kind of like a bit of a chocolatey nature but then these nice kind of chewy tannins on the finish. So more kind of fun, approachable on the nose. But actually quite... there's a masculinity on the palette, but just really vibrant.

G Greta Megroff 17:27  
Oh, what would you say is the masculinity on the palette because I find this quite interesting. Like...

J Janina Doyle 17:34  
I think it's the tannin structure, like and the fact that it's, I suppose they're quite chewy, but in a good way. And there's a slight meatiness which I think is really nice contrast from what so on the nose, it's more for me the pluminess and the cherries and more of that vibrant fruit. And then for me the oak is very subtle, it's very, there's just that softness of cedar, it's all kind of in the background. So when I'm drinking it that because of that tannic structure, I feel it's just got that, I think some muscles. Its a man with some muscles, but yeah, actually, but he's in like a really nice, soft pale pink t shirt. Yeah.

**G** Greta Megroff 18:10  
So yeah, he is a multi faceted guy.

**J** Janina Doyle 18:13  
Yes, he is. He can also speak five languages. All the girls love him.

**G** Greta Megroff 18:18  
So yeah, well, I like that you picked up on, yeah, the softness of the cedar and that kind of subtle spice because this one is all about the French Oak, and we have a wine called Mirto which you might have tried. It's like the top wine, kind of an homage to the Tempranillo grape made by Rodolfo, our chief winemaker. And this is kind of like the baby brother of that wine. So, in the Mirto vineyards, we've got plots which have vines which are like 80/85 years old, like gnarly, old Tempranillo vines. And that has to be all like hand harvested. And we don't make Mirto every vintage, obviously we only make it in really special vintages but some of the Mirto grapes from the Mirto vineyard will go into the Edición Limitada so it's that really great quality Tempranillo and those sort of little dark purpley pearls of delicious Tempranillo so this is all about the attention to the ingredients and then the soft use of French oak as well. So not in that sense your traditional Rioja because it's not super vanilla. It's not a super American oak aged but I think this wine is actually a favourite for a lot of people I know who have tried some of our wines. So that is one of the reasons I wanted you to try it because it's kind of my go to.

**J** Janina Doyle 19:45  
I just think it's, how much would this retail at?

**G** Greta Megroff 19:47  
So it retails around 15 pounds. You can get it on great wine co and we're actually coming up to doing an offer so I can mention it for anyone listening. We're going to do a 10% discount with the code JOURNEY10 on great wine co and you can get all of our wines on that.

**J** Janina Doyle 20:05  
How long does that last for?

**G** Greta Megroff 20:07  
So I think it's going to be lasting till late October.

**J** Janina Doyle 20:11  
Ok, stock up for Christmas everyone. God, I had someone last week say it was like less than 100 days to Christmas and I was like, "Oh God, here we go".

**G** Greta Megroff 20:19  
I don't want to think of that. I mean, at Christmas, Christmas is great, but I'm not ready for that. I mean, who knows where the past six months have gone anyway? How have you found Brand Ambassadoring in lockdown time?

**J** Janina Doyle 20:36  
Touch as hell, my gosh. And I should probably point out just to remind anyone who doesn't realise I am the Brand Ambassador for Viña Ventisquero. So both me and Greta have very similar positions. From being able to go to wine fairs to pour wines for people where you pour in constantly all day, to going into restaurants and wine shops and educating people on the wine and having all these different appointments and going to wine clubs, and presenting the wine. So there's all these different activities to like, Ah, I'm stuck in my house. How do I showcase the wines to people? So of course, as you know, it's like, let's go virtual. So I remember the first month I feel like I was just in shock. Yeah, I feel like there was a lot....

**G** Greta Megroff 21:21  
I can empathise.

**J** Janina Doyle 21:22  
I thought there was a like a lot of staring at the computer screen going, what do we do? What do we do? What is it like, you know, that was the first month and the second month? It's like, right, okay, I'm down with this, who can I contact for an Instagram Live, which importers want to contact our customers and we do some special tastings and then I became a bit of a zoom queen.

G Greta Megroff 21:41  
Um brilliant!

J Janina Doyle 21:42  
Then of course, then it eased off again, because everybody had had their virtual tastings. And everyone was used to doing, you know, seeing these Instagram Lives, which were very fun at the beginning. But then there was too much competition, and it became quite difficult to get your slot or to potentially the time you are taking. So I'll be honest, I've got a bit more global now. So I take my wines and try and talk to people in lots of different countries that are in different situations and see if they want to have a chat and stuff. But um, yeah, it's been. Do we use the word interesting?

G Greta Megroff 22:17  
Yeah, we can use the word interesting. It's very diplomatic. But I do totally agree. I think it was a shock to the system when I just watched all of my events and wine dinners and wine fairs and things just sort of clear from my calendar. I look back now in February and I think because I went to Rioja in February, and it was actually sort of sunny and bright and you could see sort of sap coming from the vines as well, and they were saying that that's actually it's not a great sign because it the vines are sort of waking up quite early. It's turned out to be a decent vintage anyway. But yeah, going to Rioja in February and then you know, March this all kicks off. And yeah, not being able to do wine fairs, not being able to go and visit customers because they've all closed down and I took it online as well. So in the end, in sort of start of April, in mid April, I did a series of live tastings under the banner of Spanish wine Academy.

J Janina Doyle 23:22  
Yes, I want to talk to you about that, but continue with your story.

G Greta Megroff 23:24  
Yeah, I had great fun doing the live tastings. It's something like, I think putting yourself out there on Instagram Live to start with for the first one is like, 'Right how is going to go?', and you know, you just got to sort of deal with the questions coming through, taste the wines, winesw hich I know like the back of my hand as well, but it was just doing something new and in the end, I loved it. I agree, I think when we hit it sort of the first one was end of March and then a couple more in April and then I think there was a lot of people doing a lot of Instagram Live tastings and things like that. So yeah, it was great to

get a few under my belt and it meant, I'll look back on lockdown and think we adapted. We did good.



Janina Doyle 24:08

I think I had lots of wine in my house. I drunk a lot.



Greta Megroff 24:11

Apparently consumption overall went down but I definitely feel like my consumption, Yeah, was steady.



Janina Doyle 24:20

Steady is the right word. Not irresponsible but steady, totally agree with. So you can you tell me a little bit about this Spanish Academy that you guys are doing. This is something that Ramón Bilbao, it's your project, right?



Greta Megroff 24:33

So Spanish wine Academy was an idea of Ramón Bilbao to really position ourselves in the Spanish wine education and wine education sphere. So it's not just about the wines that Ramón Bilbao makes. It's about learning about Spanish wine in general. And the idea had been to do a press tasting and we were going to do a series of events around the Spanish wine Academy concept with speakers who would talk about, like altitude in Spanish winemaking, Spanish white wines and there are going to be different levels for like Somms and people, just some people who are just like getting to know, getting introduced to Spanish wine, and then some for press and sort of thought leaders, which would be really delving into the nitty gritty of some big topics As we were saying about lockdown, our in person events didn't go to plan. But you know, these things can work really well online. And we partnered with Decanter to release a series of articles on this kind of topics we were looking to talk about as well. So altitude in Spanish wine, if anyone wants to check out the decanter website, there's some really good articles that have been produced, which come under our Spanish wine Academy and umbrella. And then the tastings that I was doing, were in that category as well. So I did one on like revisiting Rosado, partnered with a couple of guys on Instagram, like Josh, from @wordonthegrapevine. Did one like introduction to Spanish whites with Harry from Grain to Grape, and all sorts really. So the original plan was to do this tiered and multifaceted event with which we'd invite a lot of people to, but we ended up doing it sort of online instead. So I think these kinds of events with Spanish wine Academy are gonna continue because it's a really great thing to get

involved in. And we can sort of showcase other amazing wineries, whether they're from Rioja, or all around Spain. And we can get our name out at the same time. We've paused the events for the time being, but there's some really interesting articles on Decanter that you can account for. And then when we do something, whether it's consumer or trade, we'll be sure to release details of that as well.



Janina Doyle 26:53

In the meantime, we just drink the wines, right? That'll keep us going.



Greta Megroff 26:57

In the meantime, drink the wines. Enjoy the wines.



Janina Doyle 27:01

Like I'm on the other one already.



Greta Megroff 27:03

You are? Oh, you've cracked open the Altura. I need to catch up.



Janina Doyle 27:08

Oh sorry, am I going too fast? I mean, I just wanted to compare. I couldn't help myself.



Greta Megroff 27:11

No, that's a great idea. So how are you finding the comparison I on the nose, First?



Janina Doyle 27:18

I think it's more floral, more red fruit and a little bit spicier than the other one. Right, let me also might have to go back and forth, which is not the worst thing in the world.



Greta Megroff 27:28

I think those three words would fit in to the idea of the introduction of Garnacha, right? People think about that sort of spice.



Janina Doyle 27:38

Hmm, actually, the red fruits and spices comes through much more. Lets go back. This is very serious everyone. Let me go back to the other one now. Let me see what the palette was like because I felt like, am I still sticking with the masculine note. Let's see. Okay, and I'm definitely the freshness, there's a lot more freshness and fruit going on with the Altura. Whereas actually going back to the Roman Bilbao, you can you do get more of the backbone of oak and the tannin. I'm sticking with it. I feel like the Altura is more silky smooth, more floral, more violets. It's softer and rounder and the other ones a little bit for me, a bit bolder, a little bit chunkier and a little bit more grippy. That's how I feel. Do they pass or fail?



Greta Megroff 28:25

I wasn't, I wasn't assessing you. I think you summed it up beautifully though. I would totally agree. There's more of that, the fine floral notes and definitely the red fruits coming through on the Viñedos de Altura and I think the freshness really ties in with the idea that this is an altitude wine right, so the reason it's the blend of Tempranillo 50 with Garnacha 50 is that both these towns, Abalos which is in Rioja Alta. And then the Rioja Oriental where the Garnacha comes from is the Tudelilla which was planted in 1969. Yeah, they were both around an altitude of 700 metres. So that's what they have in common. Two different sites, about 700 metres in altitude and the altitude naturally, cooler temperatures at night slowing down the ripening. I mean there's so many great things about altitude winemaking but this is our kind of, this is our altitude wine.



Janina Doyle 29:27

That's really interesting because, it's funny, only recently I found out because obviously for people who don't know the Rioja Oriental, which also used to be in the past called Rioja Baja, generally, it's typically around 400 metres, isn't it? And then you have in the Rioja Alta, and obviously Alavesa much higher and then the highest altitude as far as I believe is about 800 metres in total in Rioja. I found out very recently that there are a few parts in Rioja Oriental that are 700 metres, but so, that's so funny that you said that your Garnacha is actually at 700 metres there because I didn't realise that there was that altitude in the Rioja Oriental because people obviously assuming in the eastern side it's much hotter, it's lower. That's why Garnacha grows really well there compared to the slightly more Atlantic side of Rioja, right. So is there a lot of 700 metre vineyards in the Oriental part?



Greta Megroff 30:23

There's not, there's not loads, but there's the slopes of the Monte Yerga mountain which has this high altitude Garnacha. So actually in our Roses, as well, we're working with plots in this Monte Yerga slopes area. So yeah, I suppose you're right, like the perception before, what with Rioja Oriental being Rioja Baja is this perception of closer to the ground, more of a Mediterranean climate, warmer, perhaps warm, and the reason that Garnacha tends to be made more, they'll cultivate it more there because it likes a bit more heat. But yet, you've got these pockets of altitude, which you can use to make delightful high altitude Garnacha as well. So yeah, Rioja Alta definitely associated with more of the higher altitude plots, but there is some to be found in Rioja Oriental as well.



Janina Doyle 31:20

So what is your favourite of the two wines that we just tasted?



Greta Megroff 31:23

So I think I would have to go with the Edición Limitada. I do really love the Viñedos de Altura as well see, look, I'm doing my good Brand Ambassadoring here. I love both, I just loved both so much. But I just think the Edición Limitada is so suave and soft, and I love the like French oak subtlety to it as well. That said, I am a big fan of Garnacha as a grape as well like, I love wines from Priorat, I do tend to enjoy some Garnacha wines. But I'm gonna go with the Edición Limitada and I'm just speaking from my gut there.



Janina Doyle 32:04

Well very interesting because I would actually go for the Viñedos de Altura actually. This is if I was just drinking it. I think that the Edición Limitada would go with a lot more of the kind of, you know, your steaks and your lamb and your nice red meats whereas I feel like a paella or some charcuterie and cheese, I would rather have with the Altura I've got in front of me.



Greta Megroff 32:26

The Altura for sure goes really well with like Moroccan food or anything with like, cumin or even cinnamon as well or bit of chilli too, like maybe something with chorizo in, like it can definitely balance really nicely with that and the Edición Limitada I think you're right on it there with the lamb traditional, like, probably one of the most like traditional wine pairings in the world is Rioja with lamb and I think the Edición Limitada is a great one for that.



- J** Janina Doyle 32:55  
It's a great choose. Now I notice the these are the latest vintages aren't they, they're both 2016. This is current vintage?
- G** Greta Megroff 33:01  
This is current vintage. Yep. So if you're buying it from Great Western wine or if you've had it in a restaurant, then you'll be on the 2016. I have tried the 2017.
- J** Janina Doyle 33:12  
What do you feel about this vintage compared to other vintages?
- G** Greta Megroff 33:15  
I found particularly the Viñedos de Altura I think, possibly my perception is still that it is a bit bold or a bit spicier. I think that might be based on the fact that in previous vintages it was a bit more like that. So the 2016 is a little more delicate. I think then the 2015.
- J** Janina Doyle 33:37  
Okay, I just waiting. Obviously, I know that the 2016 or 15 were pretty good vintages. But we haven't seen a vintage like 2010 have we yet. 2010 and 2005? They are the ones I tend to say to people if you're going backwards, that people should look out for. Actually in 2004 as well, I think
- G** Greta Megroff 33:56  
Yeah, for sure. And I think Yeah, I kind of remember them, some of them in fives. But in the last like 20 years 2005 is amazing, the reservas that you can still get your hands on and the 2010 as you rightly say, it was an excellent vintage, and 2011 as well. So our grand reserva is 2011 and you can still buy that and it is really special. It's really tasty. And that was 2011 was a fantastic year. And going back further. I think 1964 was meant to be like the greatest. The greatest vintage in Rioja ever. So if you're like looking out at an auction or something, maybe, you can still try something like that out. But I have been very fortunate to try some back vintages of the Ramón Bilbao wines. And it's always a treat. And obviously every bottle is like a bit of a time capsule in that way. And it's amazing. It's

just so amazing how the winemakers seem to have that catalogue knowledge of exactly how every vintage went. Yeah, the memory, the mind completely boggles. But if you're there, and you're so heavily invested in how your grapes are getting along, I'm not surprised that you remember exactly how it went.

**J** Janina Doyle 35:15

So tell me about some of the other wines, like whites don't come from Rioja. You don't do any white Rioja do you?

**G** Greta Megroff 35:21

We don't do any white Rioja, no at the moment, I'm not going to rule it out for future but we have a winery in Rueda. So make some really good Rueda wines as well. So there's a young winemaker there called Sara Bañuelos. And she works with Verdejo mostly. So Verdejo being one of the star grapes for Rueda wines. And Sauvignon Blanc as well. So the Rueda winery on Finca de las Amedias Estate we've had since 2016. So we've...

**J** Janina Doyle 35:54

Okay, so it's actually quite new.

**G** Greta Megroff 35:56

It's pretty new. Yeah, it's pretty new. There's all sorts of fun things going on down there. So we did like an Edición Limitada white Rueda which is aged on its lees and aged in Hungarian oak as well. And that's really nice. The Verdejo always seems to go down really well when I'm doing wine dinners and events as well. It's like really good example of fruity fresh zingy Verdejo. And yeah, our Sauvignon is aged in three parts. So it's well fermented in three parts. So it's in foudre, it's in concrete, and then stainless steel as well. So the idea with that is to give a nice balance of the characteristics from each technique really. So it's Finca de las Amedias Estate.

**J** Janina Doyle 36:43

Isn't that in Valladolid?

**G** Greta Megroff 36:44

It's, yea, the Rueda Winery is not far from Valladolid yeah.

- J** Janina Doyle 36:48  
Okay, fab. Do you ever get to go between the two when you, you know, back in the day when used to be able to travel?
- G** Greta Megroff 36:52  
Yeah, those were the days. Their winery in Rueda is open to visitors for sure. And you can go between the two. You can even go out to Rías Baixas as well. So I work as well with Mar de Frades, Albariño .
- J** Janina Doyle 37:07  
Hmm, this is all the same company, isn't it?
- G** Greta Megroff 37:10  
Yes. So it's all owned by Zamora company
- J** Janina Doyle 37:13  
Ah Zamora, Okay. Mar de Frades, now that is the Albariño in a blue bottle, isn't it, that has a, am i in to trouble, am I mentioning someone else's Albariño? Does it have a boat? The one that...
- G** Greta Megroff 37:24  
No, you're not in trouble.
- J** Janina Doyle 37:27  
Ok so am I talking about the right bottle?
- G** Greta Megroff 37:28  
You're talking about the right bottle? Yeah. So...
- J** Janina Doyle 37:30  
Oh, okay. This was the first, so this is the first Albariño that I ever, ever tried.



Greta Megroff 37:35

Seriously? What an honor.



Janina Doyle 37:37

Ummmmmm, there you go. And I, I loved it. And I just remember finding out that, Yeah, you could put the wine in the fridge and when it's cold enough that a boat would appear on the label, which is just awesome.



Greta Megroff 37:49

It's a lot of fun. Yeah, I like showing that off as well. A thermo sensitive label if we're being scientific about it. But, Mar de Frades is made by a lovely lady called Paula Fandiño. She was actually named one of the top 20 most influential Spanish female winemakers. And yes, she's just...



Janina Doyle 38:11

Viva la female. Yes.



Greta Megroff 38:13

Yeah. Viva La Mujer!



Janina Doyle 38:14

Viva la Chica!



Greta Megroff 38:15

Si! And that, I think Mar de Frades is a wine that it's hard not to love. And I've absolutely loved going to Galicia as well, as I was saying before about the pulpo a la gallega. Like anytime I can get my hands on fresh seafood and drink it with some Albariño, that is like heaven for me.



Janina Doyle 38:36

I've said to people and I have this as a trip that I've been planning for five years, approximately, which is to go to Rias Baixas. Because apart from the fact in Galicia. One,

yes, obviously you have great seafood. They also have a hell of a lot of cows. So the beef up there is amazing. Yeah, it's also very different from the rest of Spain in terms of it's really green. So very, very different. And then from Rias Baixas, in a boat you can get to an island called the Cies islands or 'TH'ies islands depends on how Spanish you want to be. So the Cies islands, I don't suppose you happen to have gone or you know about the Cies Islands?

**G** Greta Megroff 39:10  
No, please tell me.

**J** Janina Doyle 39:12  
Well, it's basically this national, it's a national park. You know, one of these kind of protected areas, and you can go camping there and it's supposed to be absolutely stunning. Everyone go and google but don't go at the same time as me please. So, but I just thought Albariño, drinking beautiful, drinking beautiful seafood, perhaps eating it too. And then taking a boat and just being out in nature in some stunning place that has obviously a beach surrounding this beautiful foresty National Park, it just think it sounds amazing. So it's just on my list of things to do.

**G** Greta Megroff 39:44  
Yeah, you're so right. The landscape there is much more rugged and the rainfall is much higher than elsewhere in in Spain. I mean, it's higher than like Manchester. I believe a town thats sort of the heart of the region is Cambados. I went to a really beautiful little seaside town with my friend once we actually combined a trip to Porto and then drove up to Mar de Frades as well, and we had lunch in Sanxenxo, which is a mouthful, that's two x's in that, by the way and the weather as we were saying was rainy and grey, but it was still amazing and we had just too much of arroz like paella style dish as well, that we had to take it away with us as well. And like eat it. Yes, well super good memories.

**J** Janina Doyle 40:36  
Spain does great wine and it does good food. But one of the things that we haven't covered and we should quickly look at we said how beautiful Rias Baixas area, Galicia is but actually Rioja, the Cantabria mountains, in the background with the river running through many of the vineyards are very close. In fact, in Haro, where you guys are situated, and many of the wineries, you can have such a great few days in Haro, and the views are beautiful, right?

- G** Greta Megroff 41:00  
Totally. And as you say, like one of the things that makes it such a special winemaking region as well, and like the climate control, as well as because it's sheltered by the Sierra de Cantabria. And it's got all these mountains, it's sheltered in the west by the Sierra de la Demanda, as well. And yeah, it's got all sorts of landscape and you can drive through all these like picture perfect towns as well. You've got Haro, which is kind of the little heart as well. It's really picturesque, and you can just walk from winery to winery and just taste.
- J** Janina Doyle 41:37  
That one's the easy one. You don't need a car, that can be very dangerous. The amount of wineries you can visit in one day. I know I tried to keep up with my dad. I couldn't.
- G** Greta Megroff 41:46  
That's the only problem about wanting to taste wine and wanting to go on like city breaks to different towns, is that you need a driver, really. But yeah, Haro, you can definitely, you can stroll from different wineries.
- J** Janina Doyle 41:59  
Oh no, I got to get back there now. It's just making me feel like, I'm feeling homesick and they don't live there at all. Is it any other wines that we haven't talked about?
- G** Greta Megroff 42:08  
Well I think people should definitely try the Mirto, if you're like splashing out or have a special occasion the Mirto is our chief winemakers passion project, I would say and that's the wine I was saying that for the Edición Limitada, which you are trying, we use some of the grapes from the Mirto Vineyards going into the Edición Limitada but the Mirto is just 100% gnarly old granddaddy vine Tempranillo.
- J** Janina Doyle 42:35  
Love a bit of granddaddy Vines!
- G** Greta Megroff 42:37  
Yeah, they are not moving particularly fast anymore, but they are, they have really honed

their craft and they're producing like awesome, just delicious fruit. And that's all aged in French oak again, and it's so, the fruit is just so intense. And you've got that backdrop of the touch of sort of smokiness you've got like tobacco and all kinds of like cigar box notes as well. And it's delicious with, I guess hearty meals like steak or kind of cured cheeses as well. And that's that's one that I would crack out on a special occasion for sure.



Janina Doyle 43:14

Greta, thank you so much for taking us on, actually not just a journey of Ramón Bilbao in Rioja, but we got to go over to Rias Baixas and of course, Rueda as well. So we need to get Spain I say this on every you know, every podcast with whoever I'm talking to. We've got to go to that country now. But I mean it Gosh, wine, food, culture, travel. It is the best thing in life in my opinion.



Greta Megroff 43:36

Totally. And um, yeah, I'm so sad to be leaving the wine industry for a bit but also like excited for what I'm doing next.



Janina Doyle 43:46

We didn't even say, Greta is abandoning us, abandoning ship, as of literally, by the time you guys listen to this podcast, she will have gone forever, forever...



Greta Megroff 43:55

I know. And it's been it's been like a month of starting to say goodbye for me. And the fact that I won't be going to Rioja when it's beautiful and autumnal and you've got like all these amazing colours, is such a shame, but I'm trying my best to keep my hand in the wine industry. So I'm starting up a little page, which is @anthrovino, where I'm going to be doing my student life plus drinking wine because you're going to need that. You're going to need the wine during a Master's, I'm pretty sure.



Janina Doyle 44:27

Yes. And you haven't said, just so everyone knows, you're doing the Masters in Anthropology right?



Greta Megroff 44:31

I'm doing a Master's in Social Anthropology, it's something that fascinates me. And there are a couple of times, like a couple of things you were saying, that was just making me think of the discipline really, because I mean wine is so tied to culture. And what I'm going to be studying is all around just human culture. So people in the wine industry have great discussions around like the culture of wine as well. And I think places like Galicia, Rioja, like their whole identity is tied to the way they make wine and you know, generations and generations have like passed down their vineyards. So there are so many special aspects that anthropology and wine can cross over. So I'm going to be exploring those a little bit as well. While I do my course.



Janina Doyle 45:15

Well, I will put in the show notes your website so that people can see what you're drinking as a student. So thank you so much Greta, I really appreciate it. And I will be enjoying these wines for the rest of the evening.



Greta Megroff 45:28

Thank you so much. Thank you.



Janina Doyle 45:34

So seeing as Greta was talking about the culture and some of the generations of winemakers, I thought I would touch on some of the interesting points of history for wines of Rioja. Now, if you go back into history, we're talking the 11th century BC with the Phoenicians. Lots and lots of evidence of the Romans doing their part. As a negative for Rioja. It didn't have a river that takes you out of the country, for instance, like Bordeaux, or like the Loire Valley, and certainly back in the times, if you had a river, it was far easier to transport your goods. However, Rioja always had a decent name, even though it wasn't transporting the wines too far. And that's because of one of the disciples of Jesus called St. James or in Spain known as Santiago. Now he is the patron saint of Spain. When he died, they built a cathedral where his grave is and the biggest pilgrimage in Spain was created. Now this pilgrimage, the Camino de Santiago, goes all the way through Logroño and through Rioja so all these people throughout the years who were doing the pilgrimage, were always stopping in people's houses and drinking the wines of Rioja. So it always had a name for itself. Now there were other famous names that have gone down in history of trying to modernise and create better quality wines. One was Manuel Quijano in the 1780s. He went to Bordeaux to learn about oak barrels and brought them back and



the idea was so they could start transporting to the Americas and he did, with success. However, with laws, regulations, you were not allowed to charge more money for a wine that had aged in oak barrels than a wine that hadn't so it just wasn't viable, and this disappeared. You also had Luciana de Murieta, who might sound familiar, he eventually got the name Marqués de Murrieta, you may have heard of this winery. He went over to Bordeaux, again to learn techniques. Techniques like crushing and fermenting in vats and longer ageing of wine in oak barrels, because they were trying to figure out why Bordeaux wine was selling so well in London and they wanted to compete. Either way, these two people did really good things for the production and quality of Rioja wines. But it still didn't really do much until the 1860s when phylloxera came. Now, if you don't know about phylloxera, do look it up. It devastated most of the vineyards in Europe during the 1800s. Now, it came across from America. It's this disgusting little louse that feeds on the root and vines and kills them. They're different species in America. So those vines were fine. But when they got brought over to Europe, and specifically starting in France, our *Vitis Vinifera* vines couldn't cope, and were absolutely destroyed. So at this point, in the 1860s, the French wine makers needed wine, needed to carry on making wine, needed to carry on drinking wine. So Bordeaux to Rioja, not very far. They headed on down and this was also significant because Haro spelt Haro H A R O had just got a railway station. So this created much more transportation route to making things much easier. And so you will find if you ever go to Haro, which is the wine capital of Rioja, some of the oldest wineries are literally on either side of the railway station. And that's because the French setup shop, of course, brought all their techniques, the expansion happened, the modernization happened and quality grew. And that's something that of course, now we get to enjoy the benefit of.



Janina Doyle 49:06

Now, I already finished up on episode 31 with a Salvador Dali, quote, however, he is a Spanish artist. This is about Spanish wine this episode, so I will bring another one of his wine quotes into this. And he said, "He who knows how to taste does not drink wine, but savour secrets". So I hope you find some beautiful secrets. Go out and get some Ramon Bilbao wines. There are definitely some secrets in there. A big shout out to those of you who have left me some reviews and comments, the likes, the sharing, everything really helps for this podcast to be slightly more discoverable. So really appreciated. Please subscribe if you haven't already, because, can you imagine missing an episode of this? And so until another episode, have an amazing week and cheers to you!